

BOOK REVIEW

Nudibranchs of Southern Africa. A Guide to Opisthobranch Molluscs of Southern Africa. By Terrence Gosliner. 1987. Sea Challengers, 4 Somerset Rise, Skyline Forest, Monterey, CA 93940 USA. 136 pages, 268 colour plates. \$ (US) 34.95, paperback.

This book has been eagerly awaited for several years by all malacologists interested in opisthobranchs. The book has been well worth the wait. It begins with introductory pages describing the basic features of the biology of opisthobranchs: their evolutionary history, defense mechanisms, feeding, reproduction, systematics, and biogeography. This section also includes notes on how to collect opisthobranchs. The second section is a taxonomic listing of the species known from southern Africa followed by a key to the species included in the book. The key is accompanied by a glossary of terms and excellent black and white illustrations of various features of the animals.

The bulk of the book is the section describing 268 of the species which are currently known to occur in southern Africa. The photos are not comprehensive as a number of species reported to occur in the area are not included and no doubt further collecting will reveal the presence of many more. For each species the family is given, followed by scientific name, notes on taxonomy, natural history, occurrence and distribution, and a colour photograph. The inclusion of a colour photograph is essential for these animals, which so often lose most of their colour in preservative, and the photos are in general outstanding. These are the real strengths of the book.

Opisthobranch taxonomy is difficult and the identification of many of even the most common species in most parts of the world is uncertain. Of the 268 species illustrated in the book, 100 are considered to be undescribed. Dr. Gosliner is an acknowledged opisthobranch expert and the identifications are as sound as are available with our current knowledge of the group. No doubt various experts will disagree about the classification of many of the species. The cover photo for example is of a species listed as *Nembrotha purpureolineata* which was described by C.H. O'Donoghue from the Houtman Abrolhos, Western Australia. The illustrated specimen differs considerably in colouration from specimens from the Abrolhos, and probably is a different species.

There are unfortunately several drawbacks to the layout of the book which detract the ease which it can be used. The localities in which species have been found are recorded in the text but the map showing where the localities are is hidden on the next to the last page. Sizes of the photographed specimens are listed on the back page. Size information would have been more easily used if it was included with the species description, allowing ready size comparisons of species of the same family shown on consecutive photographs. Features of the opisthobranch orders are summarised in the systematics section in the beginning of the book. Species in the text are arranged in systematic order but there is no description anywhere of the basic features of a family.

These criticisms are not meant to indicate a negative attitude towards the book. In general it is well presented and the printing is good. The book is an excellent contribution to our knowledge of opisthobranchs. As many of the species included occur widely over the Indo-West Pacific, the book is of interest to readers over a much wider geographical range than the title implies. I recommend the book for anyone interested in molluscs, and believe it will be essential for the personal library of every opisthobranch worker.

F.E. Wells